RELIGION

The General Character of Havasupai Religion

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[Spier (1928, 275, 289) has well, but briefly, discussed the position of supernatural beliefs in Havasupai culture. Religion was poorly developed; ceremonialism was meager except perhaps when it involved shamanistic practices. Some incipient borrowing was made from the Hopi in the use of prayers, masked dancers and prayer sticks; from the Southern Paiute in the acceptance of the 1890 ghost dance; and from the Mohave funeral rites. The concern with shamans and curing through spirits was typically Yuman, as were cremation, mourning ceremonies and fear of ghosts. The round dance undoubtedly was derived from the Great Basin. (See also Spier, 1929).]

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Cosmology

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The Havasupai believed that the world was flat and that the sky was a dome that came to meet the earth all around the edges. The middle of the world was at the San Francisco Peaks [the highest peaks in Arizona, north of Flagstaff, and visible from all parts of Havasupai territory except, of course, in the deep tributary gorges of Grand Canyon. This visibility accounts for the belief that the San Francisco Peaks are central in Havasupai world concepts even though, geographically, they are near the southeastern corner of their former range]. The earth, high in the middle and sloping away to the edges, was small, but the sky was large and very high.

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Underground consisted of four levels, as did the sky. Shamans are reported to have seen these latter levels, which were inhabited by people with wings, sky people, mi ǎ?bă?djih.

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The Havasupai recognized six directions, including the zenith and nadir (Spier, 1928, 169). There existed a vague notion of an ocean to the west [probably learned from the Mohave who had traded with coastal people]

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Of the neighboring tribes the Havasupai knew the Walapai, Hopi, Apache, Southern Paiute and Navajo. [An interesting denial of knowledge of the Yavapai perhaps results from the Havasupai consideration that, of all creatures, the Yavapai were farthest from a human category. Further, unless one makes specific separate inquiry, Havasupais often tend to equate the Yavapai and Apache. Tales of Apache raids in reality refer to Yavapai encounters.] They knew of Zuni and Acoma, but did not visit Zuni or farther east. Knowledge of these pueblos came to them through the Hopi.